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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION - ELECTIONS: ISLAMISTS WELCOME YOUTH
AND WOMEN, AND THE SATELLITE REVOLUTION

Block Quotes

Monday, June 19, 2006

-- On Sunday, June 18, 2006 the conservative daily Al-Watan newspaper published an opinion column by a Kuwaiti attorney Rashed Al-Rada'an where he noted the new changes in Kuwait's political arena. The column carried the headline, "These people are serious." Mr. Al-Rada'an observed, "There is obvious political and public action in our society these days. We are seeing people putting forward plans, and presenting their points of view on different issues. However, there are some things we are witnessing for the first time. This is the first time that we see the Islamist coalition groups, the liberal camp, the Constitutional Muslim Movement - Muslim Brotherhood - and the Salafis all agree on one agenda.... This is the first time that we see candidates from the Islamist groups welcome young people in orange from both genders, without any objection to women's participation in election tents. They are not even being conservative about it, although they were the ones who used to consider mixed gender meetings as "haram" [forbidden by God].... This is a civilized change. We are witnessing women with and without veils from all districts actively participate in the election process. This is the democracy that we want for Kuwait."

-- The opinion section in conservative Al-Watan newspaper on Monday, June 19, 2006 included a column by Mr. Hassan Ali Karam that carried the headline: "Chasing Private Satellites!! Has Al-Sanousi Erred?" Mr. Karam defended the Minister of Information and said: "The appointment of the Minister of Information to his current position was welcomed by everybody. I hope that he continues to serve as the Minister of Information in the new government. Our public information sector needs restructuring and we hope that Mr. Al-Sanousi will lead our public media into a new era...; however, we still maintain that Mr. Al-Sanousi might have rushed into taking the decision to chase after the private satellite channels. His decision upset a lot of people and began a media war against the new minister. Instead, Mr. Al-Sanousi should have suggested opening a government-sponsored TV Channel that would report on the elections, and give informative reports about election progress in Kuwait. The government of Egypt did just that before and during its last election."

-- Daily moderate Al-Qabas published a column by Mr. Salah Al-Mudhef under the headline "The Era of Mouth Gagging Is Over." Mr. Al-Mudhef questioned, "The 'We Want It Coalition' TV Channel will continue to air as long as there are young men and women who believe that freedom of opinion is the foundation of democracy, and that in today's open world, censorship has no place. Furthermore, why has the Minister of Information not dealt with other TV channels that attack Kuwait day and night? Are we going to witness a day when the Minister of Information would call for the closure of Al-Jazeera TV?"

-- Fouad Al-Hashem commented in his daily column in conservative Al-Watan on his visit the previous night to a female candidate's election tent in that, "The time was past midnight when my friend Hassan Al-Bassry and I received a call from Dr. Rola Dashti to visit her election tent. We went there, and we had interesting conversations with the candidate who holds a doctorate degree in economics, and who is not supported by the U.S. Embassy as it has been rumored. The power generator in the tent has been donated by a friend of Dr. Dashti; the tents were also donated by people and companies that support Dr. Dashti's election campaign, and not by the U.S. Embassy. All the requirements were arranged by friends and colleagues of Rola, and the rest she paid for from her own pocket."

-- Saud Al-Samaka, a liberal academic and columnist in the daily moderate Al-Qabas, wrote an article under the headline "Vote Buyers are Equal in Crime to Drug Traffickers, if not Worse" where he opined, "In a conversation I had with the First Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of Defense and Interior, his statement that equated vote buyers and drug traffickers was meant to send a message to the law enforcement agencies in Kuwait to act

aggressively against anyone involved in vote trafficking. In the same fashion, the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs should issue an announcement to all mosque Imams to preach against this shameful act during prayer sermons, and in their public speeches.... The young men and women who have put on the orange symbol represent a snowball of reform that may uproot all forms of corruption."

-- Dr. Shamlan Yousuf Al-Issa, political activist and professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, wrote in daily pro-government Al-Seyassah an article that carried the headline "Freedom of the Media." Dr. Al-Issa enquired, "The question that we face is whether the move by some Kuwaitis to air their opinion on private satellite channels should be considered a revolution against government control over the media, and if this was a call to liberate Arab media? In other words, can we consider this move a rebellion against public media, which has become an echo of governments' policies?" Dr. Al-Issa concluded, "Public sympathy with these channels does not constitute a new media phenomenon, because fierce competition in the media market together with high operation and start-up costs, and add to that shortage of ad revenue all will force these private channels to close, or at least reconsider their operating plans. Nevertheless, we are certain that the media environment in the Gulf does not allow for freedom of expression. This freedom is a product that every channel seeking success must seek."

-- Dr. Sami Nasser Khalifa wrote in the independent Arabic daily Al-Rai Al-Aam, "The government today is well aware of the identities of the groups that are involved in paying bribes. The government knows these brokers, their clients, and when, where, and how much is being paid and to whom. The government has all the utilities that would allow it to put an end to these shameful acts. Nevertheless, we see no action being taken to call a halt to these practices. This lack of action by the judicial authority is an indirect support for the criminals, and an indirect encouragement for them to continue to spread corruption."

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